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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Traditionally, school social workers have participated in the preventive mental hygiene approach in sharing responsibility for parent education in the schools. This series of papers examines specific knowledge and skills necessary and specific contributions which the school social worker may make—particularly as related to the child's favorable entry and beginning school experience.

Miss Weston's paper offers an interpretation of school social work to the school principal. Here is an acceptance of the wide range in principals' understanding and use of a service indigenous to Rochester elementary schools. It points up the importance and continuous need for interpretation to school personnel in their own language and place of concern. This is as important in a well established service (Rochester has had school social workers forty years) as a more recently initiated one.

APPROACHES TO WORK WITH PARENT GROUPS IN SCHOOL SETTINGS¹

GERTRUDE GOLLER, Associate, Leadership Training
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In her recent *Report of a Study of School Social Work Practice in Twelve Communities*, Mildred Sikkema not only described school social work services, but also posed some challenging questions in regard to future developments in this specialized field of work. She pointed to the need to clarify further the particular purpose, methods and goals of the job of the social worker within the considerations of the multiple needs of the individual child and parent, the teacher, the school and the community.

Miss Sikkema wrote: "The integration of education and social work in a public school setting has enhanced the educator's sensitivity to the needs of the individual child and has furthered the participation of parents and community agencies in promoting the child's fullest growth and development through the educational process . . ."²

She further stated: "Educators and social workers share a common concern for the well-being of children, yet the integration of a social work function within an educational setting poses many problems for exploration."³ She then posed several questions about ways of making the services of the school social worker more effective. One of these was: "Should his services be used only for children with special needs, or can he be drawn into the school's total functioning toward the goal of improving the mental health of all children in school? . . ."⁴

It is with this question that this paper is concerned. A review of the subject-matter of articles appearing in the *Bulletin* of the National

¹ Presented at Joint Session of National Association of School Social Workers and Child Study Association of America, National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 13, 1954.

² Sikkema, Mildred, *Report of a Study of School Social Work Practice in Twelve Communities*, American Association of Social Workers, New York, 1953, p. 4.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Association of School Social Workers during the course of the past five years, supports Miss Sikkema's finding that the traditional concern of the school social worker has been with the children who give "... evidence of social or emotional difficulty which is interfering with their attendance, learning, or normal social development".⁵ School social work is seen as existing "... primarily to provide a helping service within the educational setting, for children who encounter difficulty in participating constructively in the school program".⁶ Yet, in her review of the laws of several states governing the establishment and conduct of school social work programs, Miss Sikkema notes: "The primary objectives of the laws varies among the states, and stems from concerns about the responsibility of the schools for healthy development of children".⁷

I am by no means unaware of the fact that the interpretation of the specific way in which the intent of these laws is to be implemented is often more influenced by the superintendent of schools than by the school social worker. Yet, I believe that in most school settings it is accepted that one of the important functions of the school social worker is the constant interpretation of the ways in which school programs can implement mental hygiene principles. One of the basic tenets to which most of social work subscribes is that preventive programs are of primary importance. In some school settings these are being attempted through having the social worker concentrate his efforts on services to children in the primary grades who are presenting special difficulties. But even here, written materials currently available indicate that these services do not start until the child is already showing symptoms of personality disturbance.

The question may well be asked: "But how can we start sooner?" This is indeed a valid question. It is unlikely that there is any school social worker who has enough time to work individually with all the children and parents already referred to him. He is therefore understandably not likely to seek additional ways of offering his services. Conferences with administrative personnel of the school and with teachers, individual interviews with parents and children, liaison between school and community agencies—all of these areas of work are important in the school social worker's contribution toward helping children make constructive use of their school experiences.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

There are probably few of us who are or have been in school social work who are not periodically plagued inwardly by two questions we ask of ourselves: "Is there something that could have been done to prevent or lessen this child's problem?"—and, secondly—"What can I contribute toward maintaining the present healthy adjustment of the other children in school?"

The proposition of this paper is that there be more widespread development of parent education programs as part of the contribution of the school social worker (and—where they are in this field—the school psychologist) to the preventive mental hygiene program of the schools. This can by no means eliminate the continuing necessity of individual work with parents and children who have special problems. But it does offer an opportunity to large groups of parents to increase their understanding of themselves and their children. This is help of a kind that can carry them through the seeming crises of the often bewildering changes in children's behavior as they go through progressive developmental stages.

The idea of parent education programs for preventive purposes is by no means a new one. Interestingly enough, it was parents themselves who felt the need for this when, as early as 1888, a group of parents came together to study current literature related to children or to family living as a way of examining their handling of their children. This group was the precursor of the Child Study Association of America. Since that time, parent education groups have developed throughout the country with a particularly rapid development in the past ten years. These groups meet under many auspices, such as State extension services, adult education programs, social groups, religious centers, social work agencies and parent-teacher associations. Sometimes they sponsor a single program on child development and parent-child relations, other times they have a series of related meetings. The important thing in this is that from the fact that literally thousands of programs in parent education are held each year throughout the country, one can only conclude that parents have a vital interest in this kind of help.

The variety in the sponsorship of these programs may well raise questions about why the school social worker should enter this field of work. What his special contribution is and can be is discussed in Mrs. Auerbach's paper.⁸ Our question here is what are the specific kinds of

⁸ Auerbach, Aline, B., "The Special Contribution of the School Social Worker in Work with Parent Groups," presented at the same session.

programs possible and what is there in such programs that is valid for the function of the school social worker?

From the time a child enters school, his parents are inevitably aware of the fact that this experience away from home has become a vital part of their child's life and will continue as such for many years. Most parents are eager for their children to do well in school socially and scholastically. But not all know how to contribute to this kind of success. This does not apply only to the disturbed parent. It is not unusual to find a child enrolled in kindergarten or first grade whose first experience with school is unhappy because he has not been adequately prepared—or, in some instances, may not be ready. For example, he may still need a good deal of help with outer garments, or be unused to sharing toys and adult attention with other children, or be timid about telling a stranger that he has to go to the toilet, or be unaccustomed to a long separation from his mother in a strange place. How much happier his attitude about school could be if his parents had known how to judge his readiness and help prepare him.

Some of us may feel that our responsibility for children does not begin until they are actually attending school. We may find, though, that a broader view can save time and work later. For example, can we find ways of helping parents prepare their children for school so that the youngsters can have a positive experience from the very first day? In many communities children are enrolled in the spring for school admission the following September. In such places the school social worker might arrange for anywhere from one to several meetings with these parents, in groups, around the specific area of preparing children for school. In such meetings parents can share their questions and thinking about what is involved for them and their children in this new experience and could receive information they might need on what the real school situation will be like for which the child needs preparation. Parents can then use the intervening months in helping their children—if they are ready—to have additional experiences they may need toward getting ready for school, such as further independence in dressing, accepting other adults to whom their parents entrust their care, more experiences in playing with other children without constant parental supervision. The parent who finds his child unable to face separation may then earlier be ready to enlist the help of the school social worker, so that the trauma of attempted forcible separation or overly delayed school admission can be voided.

There are certainly many communities where it has become the pattern to have orientation meetings in the Spring for parents whose children have been enrolled for new admission for the Fall term. Sometimes the children are included in the same or separate meetings. By and large these are administrative meetings, conducted rather formally, in which parents are told about the school program and facilities. There may be time for a question period and for a tour of the building.

The kind of program I am suggesting, however, is different from this in several ways. Here parents would be invited to come in groups of no more than twenty-five, preferably in the evening, so both parents could attend. The content of the meeting would be based on their questions and concerns, there would be opportunity for free inter-change and discussion, and provision for additional meetings of the same group if indicated. There are many other possible variations in group programs in which parents can discuss the various aspects of helping children enter into their new school experience happily and constructively. For parents whose first child is entering school this can be a helpful and reassuring experience.

Once the child is in school, it is not unusual for parents of first-graders to express concern if their children are not reading, and those of second-graders to pressure child and teacher about lessons in arithmetic. If this pressure comes from the parents' lack of knowledge about what constitutes reading readiness, and from lack of information about new school curricula, meetings with parents at grade-level can prevent a good deal of unhappiness for parent and child. Here there can be an opportunity for the parents to share their observations and questions about their children's beginning experiences with formal learning skills and to learn from each other—with necessary information supplemented by the social worker—what is involved in learning readiness and the various factors affecting children's learning. They may then be readier to help where they can—especially in their attitude—in their child's first steps with formal learning. This is one of the places where the teacher can be used as a resource person in interpreting the psychological base for the school's teaching program, as well as the importance of other aspects of the child's schoolday life.

In some communities there are special factors affecting the child's early difficulties in school adjustment. One school whose experience I have shared closely is in a neighborhood largely populated by families who have come from Puerto Rico within the last few years. The school

has been concerned that there are few kindergarten enrollments and that many first-graders are thumb-suckers, and others plaintively ask to go home at odd hours. Attendance at the P.-T. A. meetings—which are conducted in Spanish—is unusually good, but few parents are comfortable about coming to school individually. During this past year the school social worker has used a few active parents from the P.-T. A. as a nucleus group of first-grade parents for a series of parent education meetings. Only a few have come regularly. But from this little group invaluable information has been obtained about the abrupt bottle-weaning which immediately precedes the child's school admission. They have revealed that in many families a child drinks milk only from a bottle until the day he starts school. This school is now aware of at least one of the reasons that children newly admitted are restless and suck their thumbs excessively. They are keenly aware of the importance of spending time with parents between enrollment and admission to help them understand and accept the importance of gradual weaning and of not having their children associate going to school with deprivation of satisfaction. Meetings are being planned for this Spring, with P.-T. A. cooperation, for parents enrolling their children for Fall admission. The purpose is to attempt to help these parents find ways of more gradual weaning—both from bottle and home—for their youngsters. Cultural aspects will certainly have to be considered here, but in view of the many children in this area who have been having difficulty around school admission, this seems an important preventive program.

Another point where the relations among family, school and child may be affected is the child's entry into junior high school. Both child and parents may be uncomfortable if this is a situation where a pre-teener is suddenly thrown among teen-agers for school social activities. Here, then, is another possible point of crisis where one or several sessions between parent groups and school social worker may help avoid difficulties.

There are other kinds of opportunities for the school social worker to meet with parent groups on an educational basis. This is said with a full recognition of the fact that there is nothing new about working with parent groups in a school setting. It is not unusual for teachers, school administrators and school psychologists, as well as school social workers to talk at a program meeting of a parents' association, or to lead a discussion around a film or skit. Since several school people may be involved in some aspect of work with parents, it is important for the school social worker to be clear about whose responsibility parent group

work is in his particular setting. What is being suggested here, however, is that by capitalizing on those situations where it is appropriate for him to work with the parents in a group the school social worker can make an important contribution to the preventive mental hygiene program that is part of the broad goal of education.

The particular kind of parent education program that is developed will depend on the needs and readiness of the school administration and the parent group. Some groups are served best by single meetings on specific topics related to child development and parent-child relations. Although single meetings are not likely to effect basic changes in parental attitudes, they can open up to parents a new point of view or give them additional factual information on child development. It is generally believed that parents, like all adults, are more likely to learn when the same small group meets continuously for a series of discussion meetings, under skilled leadership. Here by discussing their mutual interests and concerns, their individual attitudes and feelings, they can increase their understanding of their children and themselves. Detailed descriptions and suggestions about the organization, conduct and content of the various kinds of parent education groups possible are available in pamphlets of several associations, including the Child Study Association of America.

The development of parent education programs takes time, effort and skill. Their method and content has to be appropriate to the needs, structure and interests of the particular group. There are no detailed statistical reports on the effects of such programs. Observation by many leaders and associations involved in this work indicates, however, that for many parents this experience in parent education groups can make them feel and be more competent to meet daily living situations with their children and thereby contributes in important ways to the children's over-all school adjustment.

THE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER IN WORK WITH PARENT GROUPS¹

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and Parent Groups

Child Study Association of America

The fact that the National Association of School Social Workers and the Child Study Association of America are participating in this joint meeting on work with parent groups represents a trend that is significant for parent education on the one hand, and school social work on the other. What does this trend represent?

Let us look first at what this means in terms of work with parents today. As Miss Goller has suggested in her paper,² parent education activities are rapidly becoming part of the cultural pattern of our times. The reasons for the growth of parent activities can only be suggested here. It stems from the increased knowledge of child development and family relations that has become available in the last quarter of a century from research in psychology, psychiatry, the social sciences and education. It reflects also the effect of the many media of mass communication in bringing this material to the public at large. And it is the result also of the emotional impact on parents of being exposed to a bulk of knowledge presented with many different attitudes, some friendly, some exhorting, some condemning, some of which arouse feelings in turn that interfere with the parents' ability to digest the knowledge and adapt it to their own use. No wonder then that in their confusion they have felt the need to meet together, sometimes out of a wish to band together for mutual support as well as to seek greater understanding of their children.

Often, however, they have found their meetings disappointing. Some of the factors that may have contributed to this disappointment are becoming more clear as parent education activities have been looked at more thoughtfully and more objectively in conference at the local, state and national level. They seem to have to do first with a lack of

¹ Presented at Joint Session of National Association of School Social Workers and Child Study Association of America, National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 13, 1954.

² Goller, Gertrude, "Programs with Parent Groups in School Settings," presented at the same session.

clarity on the part of the organizers, as to what can be accomplished, as to suitable goals and the methods by which these goals can be attained. These Miss Goller has referred to in her paper. Another important factor has been the lack of suitable leadership.

To understand this situation it is necessary to stop to take a brief historical look. Although the knowledge that sparked the parent education movement came first from educational centers (primarily child development research centers in many institutional settings), child guidance clinics and psychiatrists' offices, the application of these findings to everyday home situations fell largely in the hands of individuals without special training. Parent groups were organized primarily by interested parents, and were led by the more active—and frequently more dominating—members of the group. In most instances no other leaders were available; besides the pattern for these activities was based on the assumption that anyone who was interested could function successfully in the leadership role, so no other procedure was indicated. In time, however, it became clear that, in most cases, such leaders did not have the skills needed for these meetings to become more meaningful than personal exchange over the back-fence or on the park bench. Not infrequently parental interest waned under such circumstances and the programs tapered off.

In many communities where this occurred, the parents then turned to professionals, wherever they were available—teachers, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists among others. From them they hoped to gain more psychological knowledge that would help them with their children. But parents often found group experiences under such leadership also uneven and sometimes quite frustrating. Whereas these leaders had additional funds of information on which to draw and helpful attitudes to convey, often they too did not know how to meet the needs of parents in groups. This may have been due to their *methods* of leadership, which were sometimes didactic and quite authoritarian, and which did not allow for variations in the readiness and accessibility of the individual parents to new understandings. It may have been because of the *content* of the meetings, which was sometimes focused so heavily on pathology, on abnormal, deviant behavior, that it had little bearing on more usual situations, or was so theoretical that it became meaningless. It may also have been due to the *tone* of the presentation, which may at times have been patronizing or condemning or preachy.

Parent groups seem to function best with leadership from profes-

sional workers who are close to them and to their children, and so parents turn to the school social worker in many communities, especially in urban centers. They feel that here they have a friendly person who knows children and whose job it is to help them rather than to teach or preach.

From the point of view of the school social workers themselves, parent education is coming to have a greater appeal and challenge. But while school social workers may find themselves drawn into this type of work, they often have misgivings as to their ability to carry it through successfully. Like others who come to work with parent groups without special preparation, they sometimes question what use they can make of their regular professional skills in order not to disappoint the parents—or themselves.

What *do* school social workers bring to work with parent groups? What are their special qualifications? What do they lack—or to phrase it more positively, what additional skills do they need for this type of activity? Such questions about leadership have usually been explored in terms of the personality make-up and talents of the individuals who serve as leaders. Recently, however, an attempt has been made to find more general answers, in terms of the background of training and experience that different professional groups bring to these activities from the areas of their special work.

The comments and tentative interpretations expressed in this paper are based on the experience of the Child Study Association of America, a national agency which carries on experimental and demonstration programs at its headquarters in New York City. Parent groups have been an essential part of the Association's activities from its founding sixty-six years ago. The procedures in these groups have, of course, changed in keeping with the increased understanding of parental needs and also of the process of learning. In response to many requests from professional people for special training and to pressure from the community to help increase the supply of trained parent education leaders, the Association instituted an intensive, experimental training project in 1951. This is now in its fourth year and has offered periods of training to three professional groups—social workers, those working in special areas of education and (currently) public health nurses. From this project and from experience gained through consultation with individuals and groups in many communities, we have begun to see some of the special assets and limitations of each of these backgrounds for work with parent groups. While the training program was directed primarily toward

leadership of parent discussion groups, meeting continuously for from ten to fifteen weekly sessions, the qualifications and needs of these professional groups seem to apply to other types of parent education programs as well.

The purpose of such parent education programs is not to pass out sterling nuggets of information which the audience can cash in on or not as they see fit. It is rather to help parents gain an understanding of feelings and attitudes as well as intellectual concepts of parent-child relations and to use their understanding to function more effectively as parents. These are some of the goals of what has been defined as "parent group education"—as distinct from the didactic classroom approach to teaching on the one hand and on the other, from group therapy, which explores and works through the pathology of the group members.³ For leadership of parent groups oriented to group education of this kind, experience has shown that the leader must have knowledge and skills in at least five areas. (1) He must know the normal development of children and understand the significance of characteristic behavior at different stages of growth; he must know too the characteristic concerns of parents at these different stages. (2) He must understand the dynamics of behavior, and have diagnostic awareness of emotional health, so as to help the parents build on their own strengths; this diagnostic skill will also help him to recognize the problems in both parents and children which one cannot expect to be modified within a group educational experience, and which should be referred for counseling or treatment. (3) He must be aware of cultural factors affecting family living and the wide variations in attitudes toward family members and child care practices as seen in different ethnic and social groups. (4) He must understand the dynamics of adult learning, and particularly its applicability to parents, recognizing the importance of the emotional factors in parental motivation and in their ability or inability to acquire new understanding. And (5) he must know group processes and the role of the leader in defining group goals and in helping the group to achieve these goals.⁴

Our experience has indicated that by and large, leaders trained in

³ For a further discussion of these distinctions see Neubauer, Peter B., M.D., "The Technique of Parent Group Education: Some Basic Concepts" in *Parent Group Education and Leadership Training*, Child Study Association of America, New York, 1953.

⁴ See Auerbach, Aline B., and Goller, Gertrude, "The Contribution of the Professionally Trained Leader of Parent Discussion Groups," *Marriage and Family Living*, August, 1953.

education have a better knowledge of the first area of child development and are not as skilled in the recognition of emotional health vs. maladjustment; leaders who come from social work, in contrast, are more aware of the meaning of signs of pathology, and less familiar with the characteristics of normal development. Neither group has had any significant preparation for knowing normal parental reactions to different phases of growth. School social workers seem to fall in the first or second group according to the area in which they have received the major part of their training. However, because they are functioning within the school setting, whether as school social workers or guidance counsellors or visiting teachers, they have some of the assets of both social workers and workers in the education field. In varying degrees they recognize also the cultural factors at work in families of different backgrounds. Like many other professional groups who deal with children, they have had little training in the dynamics of adult learning, unless they have come very recently from a few special educational centers. Similarly, it is doubtful whether many of them have been exposed to the newer concepts of group processes and of the role of the group leader—as distinct from the teacher—in helping the parent members gain the understanding they are seeking, each at his own pace, to suit his own needs, in order to guide his children in ways that seem right for him.

In addition to a more general knowledge of children and of children in groups, school social workers have of course knowledge of individual children in the school and their parents, and of the school setting in which the group is held. This special knowledge can be an asset, since the worker is often familiar with the situations the parents bring to the group, which he can help them to look at more thoroughly, from different points of view. This knowledge can, however, create a problem in leadership. How can a leader use this information for the benefit of group members and the group itself without revealing confidential material he has had given him in the course of his primary professional work? Some school social workers have found themselves hampered in this situation. They find themselves so afraid that they will inadvertently let slip something they do not want the group to know they know, that they become awkward and tense and often direct the thinking of the group away from aspects of the children's lives and of the parents' own concerns which might quite suitably be explored. Other workers, not as thoughtful about this aspect of group discussion, occasionally refer to specific knowledge about parents or children, not brought out in the group, and are not prepared for what follows. Then parents become

self-conscious and constrained, and the leader's rapport with the group is broken, as members become aware that he may have a special relationship with some individual parents which he does not have with them, and those whom he has also seen in private conferences become afraid that their special concerns may also be revealed. It is possible, however, to handle this double role with relation to group members, and many leaders do so quite comfortably. It means that they have to use themselves in a conscious professional way, separating each of these aspects of their function. The knowledge they have gained in individual contact can give them additional understanding of those families and the problems they face, and can alert them to pick up significant comments made in the group and encourage these and other parents to talk about them further. But they must be careful not to refer to specific facts *not* mentioned voluntarily by the parents themselves in the group. Comments and interpretations based on a general, wide knowledge, however, are suitable and safe, and when related to the material presented in the group, can be a significant contribution in adding to the content of the discussion. They broaden the base of information which each parent will use for his own needs, to work out his own conclusions.

In one school group, for example, the parents suggested to one mother that the school social worker leader should see her son about a reading problem, accepting the fact that such a contact was part of her regular work. The mother followed the suggestion and the worker arranged an appointment for the boy. At the same time she made clear to the mother that the boy's problem would be handled as quite separate from the group. The mother subsequently made one brief reference in the group to the fact that the leader had seen the boy, but the leader did not pick this up and the group accepted the leader's attitude and made no further comments. With her help they could make the distinction between her two roles and could respond to her in either or both as was indicated without confusing the two.

There is another situation that the school social worker needs to be aware of, so that he can handle this constructively, too, in the group. Since he knows the problems of both the school and the parents, he often finds himself somewhere in between, called on to interpret the school to the parent or the parent to the school, or both. In seeing both aspects of the home-school relationship, can he remain the true leader figure who helps the parents see all sides of the picture, without identifying himself with the one or the other? This problem is often made difficult by the leader's attitude toward the school in which he works. He may

be critical of the school, aware of its shortcomings and even, at times, eager to help the parents mobilize their forces to bring citizen pressures toward improving school conditions, both with regard to better physical facilities and better teaching methods. Yet at the same time he is hesitant to throw his weight in this direction, because of his very position on the school staff. On the other hand, if he is critical of parents and feels that they are asking for the impossible, he may become defensive toward their comments, and try to justify the school's accomplishments and minimize its weaknesses. This attitude may be quite destructive to the group, since it may create or reinforce negative feelings in the group members. Parents naturally tend to identify school social workers with the teaching staff and may transfer to them feelings of antagonism—or dependency—which are often found in parent-teacher relations. It would be interesting if one could judge how much of these feelings grow out of the actual school situation and how much they are a transference-manifestation of the parents' own childhood attitudes toward their own teachers, reactivated, as it were, by their identification with their children as *they* go to school. That it exists, there is little doubt. Group leaders must be alert to recognize these feelings when they occur, to help the group express them and to check them against the realities of the present school situation, without probing into the past. They have to watch themselves, too, so that they maintain their objective leadership role, without responding to the members' antagonism with hostility and to their dependency with advice-giving.

The school social worker, by meeting with parents in groups, in a different kind of helping situation, has an opportunity of setting a new atmosphere and establishing a new kind of relationship. But he must be conscious of the possible emotional overtones parents bring to the school and conscious of his own emotional identifications, so that he can truly serve as a neutral person, functioning in the interest of the group.

This discussion suggests, then, some aspects of the role of school social workers in the leadership of parent groups, and some of the special advantages and limitations they bring to this work both because of their training and of their special role in the schools. It is hoped that these comments will serve as a basis for further discussion. It would be helpful to pool our thinking, first, as to whether the observations on which these comments are based have been experienced by others of us here; and second, as to what can be done thoughtfully and consciously to supply the additional skills which will enable school social workers to function more successfully in this added professional role.

Discussion on APPROACHES TO WORK WITH PARENT
GROUPS IN SCHOOL SETTINGS by Gertrude Goller,
and THE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE SCHOOL
SOCIAL WORKER IN WORK WITH PARENT
GROUPS by Aline B. Auerbach¹

DR. JOSEPH ROSNER, School Social Worker
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The excellent papers presented by Miss Goller and Mrs. Auerbach help to fill a growing need felt all over the country by those of us concerned with parent education programs. The need to clarify subject matter, goals and leadership qualities is raised again and again by various groups interested in helping advance such programs.

Both papers recognize as basic the preventive rather than remedial role of parent education programs. The attempt is to reach parents of children who present routine problems in the growth process. This implies a certain maturity and acceptance on the part of the parents. Since this is by far the largest group of parents concerned with children and their problems, it is felt that Parent Education Programs are one way of succeeding in attaining the general goal of implementing sound mental hygiene practices in every day living situations.

There can be no question that if parents can be helped to meet the growing complex problems of a modern civilization superimposed on the basic needs of children, a real contribution will have been made not only to parents but to the nation as a whole. It is quite clear that what is at stake in this program is not only the mental health of the individuals concerned in the present, but the very pillars of our democracy in the future, namely our children. The parent education program therefore, as one of the effective methods used for reaching our citizens holds great promise. Both the Child Study Association of America and the Parents Education Project at the University of Chicago, financed by the Ford Foundation, see their programs in terms of meeting the needs of large

¹ Presented at Joint Session of National Association of School Social Workers and Child Study Association of America, National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 13, 1954.

groups of people. A great deal of preliminary work has already been done by the Child Study Association in New York City. Its program of in service training attempts to reach leaders on an emotional as well as an educational level. The fact that a clinic program has been established points up the recognition given this problem. It is further recognized that continuous meetings consisting of 10 to 15 sessions is more effective than individual meetings led by discussion leaders. This fact emphasizes again the need for special training for such leaders.

Mass educational programs must be based on sound principles. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that no program dealing with human beings operates like a machine. The soundness of any program will depend on the individuals participating as leaders in such a program. In this respect parent education programs are no exception. The need to make use of as many interested and previously trained people in related fields is essential. This is especially true of a program that has only so recently become aware of its potential importance. It would thus be wise to include social workers, school social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, and any other interested adults in related fields.

It would seem unwise to set up one group above another as the best qualified in this expanding and as yet infant field. While it is recognized that the school social worker may have special qualifications this would not seem to preclude others who might be trained to reach parent groups. As we think of this problem we can see how important it is to be aware of some of the problems facing us in this new field. First of all, most schools do not have school social workers. Whether or not we feel that they should have them, the fact remains that they do not have them. Since it is recognized that one of the most effective and natural ways of bringing together parents and leaders is the school setting, this is an obstacle in setting up the school social workers as the best qualified person to act as leader. Secondly, any individual whether he be a laborer, truck driver, doctor, or social worker recognizes the importance of cautiously approaching any new group. The question of the existing "gatekeeper" and his vested interests are of particular importance to any recently initiated member. It is necessary to "go slow in the beginning". This obvious act cautions us to be alert to the fact that a psychologist, principal, assistant principal, teacher, school or other community leader may consider this area his or her own. Thirdly, the fact that leaders for these programs will be trained in various centers throughout the country, such as those already mentioned, precludes the attempt to make this field the almost exclusive domain of school social workers. What-

ever the previous training of the person involved might have been, the new programs established to train group leaders will have to be prepared with primary focus on parent education. This means that the techniques and knowledge known to previously trained personnel in related fields will have to be transferred and modified as deemed necessary to the field of parent education.

While it would therefore, appear essential that parent education programs be based on generic training for group leaders throughout the country (and this is itself in the distant future), it would not seem necessary to limit the groups to be trained. Since parent education is not based on strictly didactic learning but is rather geared toward helping parents become aware of their feelings as well as their actions, the individuals chosen as leaders must have this special sensitivity themselves. In building the leadership core in such a program it is most important to emphasize the individual personality qualifications of the candidates. In this respect it is not so necessary to choose any existing discipline as the base group from which leaders are to be selected and trained. More important, it would seem, would be to choose those individuals as leaders who have the capacity and the competence to relate to other human beings. They must be flexible, sensitive and above all, interested and devoted to the work. If such people, who may not have had previous training, can be attracted, both the breadth and scope of such programs will be immeasurably broadened. In this way, the program may be extended nationally. Such people would need reassurance that natural talents already manifested could be integrated into a learning program. There is no way of knowing how much personal anxiety prevents adults who have not had a specific background of formal education from contributing their skills to others around them. The sensitivity of training program coordinators is thus put to the realistic test of discovering ways and means of attracting potential leaders to the program.

We are faced with an opportunity to really bring sound mental hygiene concepts before the public. Through parent education programs on a planned basis the need can be met in a sound realistic manner. Wide distribution and eventual integration of these concepts will help to break the circular chain both of ignorance and unrealistic anxiety on the part of parents who can well make use of such programs.

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK 1953¹

HELEN E. WESTON, Chief Consultant, Home and School
Counseling Service

Board of Education, Rochester, New York

You have given me a real privilege in inviting me to speak to elementary school principals about school social work, or as we call it now, Home and School Counseling.² That we talk together this way so rarely is due in part to your congested Council schedule and to the many areas of interest and responsibility which are yours. It is frustrating to want to say so many things to you.

My purpose is to do a descriptive coverage of school social work 1953, as we are trying to practice it in Home and School Counseling. Because this service is within the eye-range in your school organization, you are familiar with much that I shall describe. Here and there each of you will have gaps or blind spots because I shall be talking from a school social worker's point of view. I shall briefly trace trends in school social work; speak of the worker's equipment and philosophy and discuss specific areas of work, such as referrals, skills, and some of our responsibilities departmentally but apart from our specific school assignments. In general, I shall not speak too often of our operating problems as such. I hope you will see them inherently in what I tell you and we can discuss them as time permits later.

In 1913, Dr. Weet gave the first statement of Visiting Teacher function in Rochester public schools. This was it, "The appointment of a Visiting Teacher is an attempt on the part of the school to meet its responsibility for the whole welfare of the child. There are few of the children in our schools who are suffering through the wilful neglect and abuse of parents. Whatever suffering comes for which the home is responsible, comes largely through ignorance or necessity. It will be the function of the Visiting Teacher to enlighten and to aid in relieving. Her field will be restricted to girls. Her aims will be to secure the maximum cooperation between the home and the school. Through such

¹ Given at Elementary School Principals' Council, Rochester, New York, 2/11/53. Rochester Home and School Counselors are assigned to elementary schools only. Attendance Department is a separate department.

² "Counselor" is the title used in Rochester to designate the "school social worker" whose training and orientation is social work, discussed in text.

a teacher, the school is by no means usurping, but it is rather stimulating and encouraging the home to meet to the limit of its power the full share of the responsibility for the welfare of the child."

In 1948, our staff made this statement of function:

1. To give social casework service
 - a. To determine suitability of the referral.
 - b. To study and diagnose problem of child referral for help.
 - c. To plan treatment of problem.
 - d. To refer cases to appropriate committees, agencies.
 - e. To carry treatment where appropriate.
 - f. To confer and consult with teachers, principals, nurses, speech teacher, psychologist, health education teacher, attendance officer, and others regarding the child, individualizing the child and his needs for said personnel.
 - g. To help parents in their relationship with child and their child in school—and to seek appropriate agency if not available in school.
 - h. To share with school psychologist the responsibility for appropriate referral to child guidance clinics.
2. To stimulate school and community agencies to meet health, social, recreational needs of children as seen by Home and School Counselor.² (Talks—community committee service.)
3. To act as liaison between school and community and in planning mental hygiene and allied programs in community.

It is a far cry from the 1913 one and represents the change in social casework philosophy since then. These changes have been mirrored in our work and we have moved through manipulative casework (the-you-tell-them, you-take-over-the problem kind) through passive technique (worker does nothing but throws problem back on client) to the relationship therapy philosophy of 1953. (The client is helped to identify and screen his feelings about his problems. In the process he decides for himself how and what he will do about them that he may become a more adequate social human being.) In 1953, school social work represents an eclectic body of knowledge and skill used by the worker as the needs of the individual client may indicate. Educational philosophy has been growing similarly in the same period. I remember in 1921, when I became a Visiting Teacher, you were speaking of the

impact on educational practice of your new discoveries. Remember "individual difference", "the whole child", "education for all the children of all the people". These have taken their rightful place in your 1953 philosophy which now includes such additions as "emotional classroom climate"; "pupil-teacher planning"; "individualization of instruction", etc.

What is basic to our Home and School Counseling conviction of the validity of school social work as a service in our school? (1) Our focus is always "for the growth of the child". (2) Within a secure relationship change is possible, even though it may be of slow growth, and even though we cannot put into it what is not there. (3) Damage to a child cannot be undone. Consequences are inevitable although with help the child may be able to tolerate that damage and make some growth. In the emotional development this is similar to the scar tissue with which the physical body surrounds a diseased spot.

I asked one of our staff to draft me a definition of school social work 1953. Instead of a "simple" statement, she brought me a combined definition and job philosophy which I shall share with you. While I am aware that each of the staff would say this in her own words, I know that there would be a fundamental likeness in all their definitive statements. One worker says: "School social work exists because people's feelings interfere with the constructive process of education. Therefore, the social worker's main contribution is in the realm of human relationships in order, in her way, to contribute to the emotions, what the nurse contributes to the body, the teacher to the intellect, the dentist to the teeth, and the principal to self-government. Her work is a way of helping all those who need and want her help to become more aware of their own difficulties so that they may become relatively more self-directing, and more productive, more giving, and, therefore, happier people. Her contribution can be used only if it is wanted. Then it is a catalytic process which is more understanding than doing, more listening than talking, more selfless than selfish, more out-going than self-conscious, more giving than talking, more permissive than authoritative. This process neither loves nor hates, and it ideally makes no judgments. It is dominated only by the realities and necessities of life. It tries to help the child, the teacher and the parent learn these facts about themselves so that they may proceed with the reality of carrying on the essential process of formal education, free from fear, anxiety and hatred."

My own definition, a simple one, is "School social work is a social casework service in a school setting and designed through its special

skills to promote the child's social and emotional growth through a better use of school."

As you get the significance of the weighty responsibility inherent in incorporating this philosophy into action in your school, you ask about the training and maturity of the worker as a professional person. Today and since August, 1946, the State Department of Education "set up minimum qualifications for school psychiatric social caseworkers—a baccalaureate degree and graduation from an approved school of social work. Such preparation shall include the equivalent of ten semester hours in courses related to psychiatric social casework." This followed the New York City requirements which have now added the preference for the psycho-analyzed worker which seems to me valid in this field which demands such maturity of its workers. In addition to the formal training requirements, we now ask several years experience in a children's agency, preferably a child guidance clinic. Teaching experience is not required although a recognized asset and currently eight of our staff have had such experience. A personal maturity is the sound core of the social worker's equipment as a professional person. This is especially essential in school social work where in each day's experience there is so much hostility, rejection and frustration and where so much objectivity, integrity and fortitude are required to keep our focus primarily on the child and his need and a promoting of the school's ability to meet it.

Well, now you have the worker with her philosophy, her equipment and function and your problem is how do you use such a worker in your school? How much do you want such a worker in your school organization? How accepting are you of the philosophy which is basic to her service? Do you have any respect for the professional discipline she represents or is it a handy frill to pull your chestnuts out of the fire on occasion? Is she an errand girl to satisfy some curiosity you may have? Do you have to tell her when and how to do her work (a questionable help to both of you)? How free is she to work in your organization? What limitations do you place on her ability? Can you allow her to be a human being too, making her share of mistakes, having her failures and not having all the answers, this despite having a skill and an approach unique within the system which can be of real service in the school organization? Does her insistence that she work within the limits of her social casework function threaten your administrative authority? Do you try to force her to assume some of this for you when a hard decision must be made? In the answer to questions such as these are

indicated the problems to which the school social worker must adjust and the degree of satisfaction she has in her work in each school.

The principal, more than any other, sets the stage for the support of school social work in his school. If the faculty feels that the principal wishes to make the counselor an integral part of the organization, the worker is more comfortable, as she has contact with them about the specific child. After all our service is in a sense a guest profession in your professional stronghold the school. You as majordomo are the acting host or hostess. Sometimes there is an awkwardness when a faculty member says to a worker in the school quite a few weeks, "And who are you?" If the worker has been introduced to the faculty as a group or met individually in a classroom tour or both, the stage is better set for both teacher and worker cooperative efforts. Adequate space and equipment should be automatic.

The Counselor offers a service *in addition* to what teacher and principal offer. She subtracts nothing from their responsibility and prerogatives. She is no substitute for them. Sometimes I am sure you are puzzled about your responsibility around a case with which the Counselor is active. This puzzlement centers around your use of authority in connection with this child. Usually these occasions occur around a seriously disturbed and troublesome child, of course. Naturally you will use your authority but hopefully in accordance with the case plan upon which you and the others involved have previously decided. In some unforeseen emergency you will have called to tell the worker your intent so that you may be sure you are up-to-date on what she knows about where the plan is, etc. It is helpful to her certainly to know if you have taken some drastic action in her absence rather than have the embarrassment of stumbling on it via an emergency, parent conference or telephone call. Because the Counselor is working with the child, and/or parent there is no "hands off" ultimatum to teacher or principal. It is rather another person working with and at another angle. It does not inhibit the teacher from treating this child as she does others in her group. We hope out of a better understanding of what is back of the behavior that she will see the depth of the need and overlook on occasion some of the exasperating symptoms if they aren't too disturbing to the group. I heard recently of a teacher who refused to have a child in her room any longer because he yawned in her face. I am not gainsaying the possible insolent intent or that it might be the last straw. Did she find out why? Was it boredom, hunger or the result of a bad night's sleep, or fighting parents, or no place to sleep? I am saying

that the teacher's choice of a spot for an ultimatum of such consequences leaves one wondering about her sense of values and whether she was waiting to pounce and not really trying to give the child much of a break. To me, it seems as if the maturity of the teacher at this point may have not been much beyond the child's. What would she do if he physically hurt another child, for instance? Recently, Dr. Milton Rosenbaum, of the University of Cincinnati, in a local Mental Hygiene meeting, said "the corps of stable people is limited. You find many of them as doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers. There are not enough to go around." Some of our difficulties around children are complicated by some of us outside that corps.

We talk today a good deal about the team concept in working with the individual child in whom is centered the interest of the school and service personnel. From where I sit, I see very little professional jealousy or overlapping. I see a great deal of mutual respect and cooperation among our professional staffs as they work with case after case focusing their knowledge and skills on a dynamic appraisal of the child's particular problem, and on a plan of action. That plan points up what seems best and who can do which part and in what sequence to effect a better adjustment for the child. In such team activity must be mutual respect for the ability of the component parts to function in accordance with their mutual planning and the responsibility to share with the others (a kind of reciprocity if you will) what is needed to keep them abreast with the difficulties encountered and the progress seen. That we have such a limited time in the school is the curtailing factor in so much of what we would wish to include. We need to remember always in this team work proposition that we have a common goal with the child, our mutual focus and the use of school the instrument through which he may attain that maximum educational growth and personality of which he is capable. There is no matter of credit for accomplishment for you or any other member of the team as such in this concept. Only the Recording Angel has the perspective to sort out and star in blue, red or gold our steps, noting who has done what and how successfully.

Now, let us talk about referrals. Aggressive discipline problems we are pretty sure to get; the withdrawn, not achieving, not so surely. Here there should be some expansion of program. Sometimes I think you become too anxious about referrals. At the risk of over simplification may I suggest this criteria for referral consideration. Any arresting deviation in behavior, personality adjustment, habits, accomplishment, etc., for whom your help and the teacher's seems not enough, should be

screened as a potential referral to the Counselor. She can help discover why a child isn't learning; why he finds it hard to accept authority and direction; why he acts in such a provoking way that a high percentage of teacher time and energy is used in getting him to conform; why he is shy and retiring having no status with other children; why he looks poorly cared for physically; why he truants; why he gets into trouble outside school, etc. In answering such questions we find the basis for corrective planning and without that any treatment is superficial and without lasting effectiveness. The State Department of Mental Hygiene says that the ratio of those in our classrooms today who will in the course of their life time require some institutional care because of personality disorders is 1 - 10. That means three or four in every classroom are probably trying to attract your attention to their need for help toward a better future adjustment. Refer them as early as you can. Early recognition is seen as essential to successful treatment. There are no emergencies in personality development. There are traumatic experiences that kink and block the orderly processes of growth, but their negative effects are possible because of a readiness which is even now a part of the personality.

The method of referral is immaterial to the Counselor if, in the process, principal and teacher have weighed all they know about the contributing factors to the problem and in pulling it all together decide there is need for counseling help. It is a great help if either or both, as they have occasion to talk with the parents, suggest with some indication of the possible area of her helpfulness that they see the Counselor. Of paramount importance is the necessity for freedom of teacher contact with Counselor and Counselor with parent and/or child as may be indicated. Having been a party to or instigator of a referral the teacher should never have to fake an adjustment because the principal's activity implies a criticism of the adequacy of the teacher who refers. I have had teachers tell me this happens. Nor do I think there is a grade level before or after which you do not refer, unless you wish to limit the quantity and variety of help you offer to children there. It is sound to consult the Counselor about your doubts about a child. Over-refer if you are anxious around this and let the Counselor in her intake sort out the which, when, and how from there on.

Sometimes a teacher may say, "What's the use?" as you suggest a referral. You may feel that way too and so do we on occasion. My answer is that the Counselor effort may substantiate your opinion and that is a supporting thing. Suggestions from the Counselor to teacher

and you out of a greater awareness of the motivations might help avoid crisis and keep the child in balance a little longer. It is reassuring too that we do not add even unconsciously to the load the child may already have.

What is this relationship therapy which the Counselor offers as her skill? It is not a doing program in the sense of much physical moving about. It is a being and trying-out-time in an atmosphere that is warm, accepting, non-judgmental, objective and almost entirely permissive. It is a time for listening to facts and feelings and growing a little nearer to recognize the conscious and unconscious why of troublesome behavior. It is a time for assaying the ego strengths present in the personality, the unevenness of the development and the areas of blockage or damage. Onto the worker or in his presence is projected the hostility the child has accumulated as the result of his efforts to live with adults, his family primarily of course, and then next with the first parents' substitutes, his teachers. And with the Counselor he has the unique experience of not meeting a response in kind. In the process the Counselor absorbs tremendous amounts of hostility but with a careful awareness of how far and how much may be unleashed and identified at a time lest, in his guilt at disclosing his true feelings, the child may become less accessible for helping. Where the damage has been too great and is too deep-seated, we turn to the psychiatrist and clinic for the help we, as social workers, are not equipped to give. With the ventilating of the hostile feelings we see the anxiety lessen and the possibility of growth moving nearer. The ups and downs of behavior in the process are like those present in establishing any new habit in the place of a long-practiced old one.

Because we need to know the horizontal and longitudinal influences in the child's life we work with parents, teachers and others in his environment. In this way we come to know the ramifications of the impacts on him and his reactions to them, and where there is the possibility of improvement both in helping the child take some responsibility for his own reactions and in helping the adults alter their habits and accept change in the child. He must feel confidence in the Counselor that this will not make his situation worse. In helping him to identify his feelings, he must be sure that what he has told the Counselor is safe with her; hence—confidentiality. To a large degree the interview pattern I have described is similar for the parent. The atmosphere, the techniques are similar. The outstanding difference is found in the play

activity which is the child's easy language of communication about his feelings.

In any interview, the Counselor is conscious always of the unspoken things said in posture, in tension, in tone and manner of speaking as well as the verbalization of concern. She watches when the issue is avoided, a partial or complete rejection; the quality of the anxiety and the why of it; the relative strengths and weaknesses present with and around which we must work.

This and much more is in every interview and always the worker must be aware of herself as a focusing agent in the relationship sensitive to the difficulty the client has in taking help; in his dependency; in his adjustment to authority and their influence on the resultant adequacy of the role he fills with his child. The worker must determine where to focus her activity most hopefully with parent, child, or sometimes teacher.

These have been difficult learnings for the worker to acquire in her student field work experience with her supervisor. These provide the responsible sensitivity she brings to the interview. I hope this glimpse of the social worker interview erases any idea that this is a simple technique and a mere visiting between a troubled person and another with a kindly heart, Lady Bountiful, or a Do Gooder. You cannot really help another against his will. He must wish to change. Some humans have too many cards stacked against them and, until some of these are changed, are untreatable. It is hard to stand by knowing what is needed for the child but forbidden it by the parents. Often lack of evidence forces us to wait until an authoritative agency can act because the deterioration has become so destructive. Although frustrating for the Counselor, I think it is more frustrating for you because of your authoritative role in school.

Home visiting has been sharply curtailed in the Counselor's program for several reasons. (1) All social work has recognized the import of the client going for help. (2) It is the professional pattern established long since by doctors, lawyers, the clergy, etc. (3) In the thin spread of Counselor's time allocated to your school, a better use of it eliminates most of the time spent going to the home. (4) In going into a home which wants none of us, we may remove the possibility of any use of our service. (5) There may be too much in the surroundings to distract parents either with or without purpose thus rendering the Counselor useless.

Record keeping is a social worker's tool in the diagnostic process. In objectively putting down the gist or the detail of the interview movement, a clearer analysis of the motivations underlying the problem is possible. Out of this comes a better sense of direction and an indication of the client's ability to move and the progress he is making. The record because of its confidential nature is not accessible to others—(exception psychiatrist, psychologist, or other social worker).

In working with social agencies around any child mutually known, our efforts are to integrate planning so that both school and agency may constructively carry out its responsibility with reference to the child. We stand in a two-way interpretative role; i. e., interpreting the role of school to the agency, and the agency to the school in the specific case. Much of this is via telephone but often in very knotty problems the case conference is held to try to determine a more effective planning in the light of the current situation.

Our in-service training program consists of a staff meeting every other Wednesday 3:30-5:00 and consultation time roughly an hour every three weeks, usually held in the school, but this semester at the Central Office. Consultation is the process of worker and consultant discussing troublesome problems in your school and working out together ways of dealing with them in the light of what we see in the client and his environmental situation and motivation. It should also be helpful to the worker in her professional know-how. Since each Counselor is a department member she is, on occasion, called upon to serve with social agency committees which have city wide implications for all of us. Because of the time involvement, we keep these to a minimum although recognizing the importance of school representation in such assignments.

The Counselor has to be a very flexible person. She has a limited time in the school. She must act as her own intake, since at best she would carry possibly four intensive cases and two or three short service ones on a day per week assignment. She must learn her way around a faculty as you do, and then multiply it by three or even four. Often she is a tight-rope walker between her own anxieties and those of the administrator, teacher, child and parent. One of our Counselors described her work as a "daily goodwill tour". In general, our workers are more system-conscious than most principals. We've travelled more widely. Anyone with us ten years has been assigned to from ten to seventeen schools. This does not count the principal changes they have known in these schools. The worker is a teacher of mental hygiene on

a case by case basis. She is equipped to and does accept the hostilities which go with the frustrations arising in the daily school problems. There are hazards, trials, failures and satisfactions in this most difficult of social casework jobs, but most of us are dedicated to it.

Ours is a service integrating into the school fabric of services. Principals, psychologists and counselors, as people standing on the periphery, are able to see the meshing of the whole. Our lasting satisfactions are in the growth and adjustment of the children with whom we have worked. We are still at the grass-roots stage of this kind of work, and we are all learning together. Any living also includes psychological learning. We are aware of this today in a way we did not dream of thirty years ago. Social work as a discipline is one of the groups well in the vanguard of this learning. Individually and as a professional group we have been afraid and overwhelmed by this fact. Like Alice, we have had to run fast to keep up, and some, of course, resist change and in the process we have differings. Social work has moved its main emphasis from correction to prevention. We know that we attempt much that seems to terminate almost futilely. I believe that as we all learn more and our cooperative efforts are supported by society's awareness, the ratio of our effectiveness will increase. We do not anticipate miracles, but we do know that out of mouldy bread came penicillin. We believe that in the future, and based on the growing pains of groups such as ours, we shall more nearly meet the basic needs of the child and come nearer to a possible peace on earth. We will do our utmost to strengthen this trend because we have so much evidence that it is good.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in a professional organization is a strengthening factor for the individual practicing within that profession. This is as true for the school social worker as it has long been for members of other professions. National Association of School Social Workers has members in 38 states and in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and India.

All members receive the National Association of School Social Workers Bulletin and other materials such as Newsletter, book lists, conference programs, notices, and other publicity. Membership is determined by the training and experience of the applicant.

Applications for membership and a statement of membership requirements may be obtained from the Membership Chairman, Mrs. Helen Roell, Indianapolis Public Schools, 150 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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Changes of address should reach the NATIONAL OFFICE as soon as possible.

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The Editorial Committee would like to publish material representative of practice throughout the country. Persons interested in having articles considered for publication are encouraged to submit them to the Editor of the *Bulletin*.

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